

**ASSESSING THE LEVEL COMMUNITY SATISFACTION
OF THE
SIGNAL HILL FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT
ST. CLAIR COUNTY, ILLINOIS**

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research project was to assess the level of community satisfaction with the services being provided by the Signal Hill Fire Department. Additionally, this project served as a mechanism to examine the necessity to expand services and to canvass if the registered voters would support a funding increase to sustain or augment existing services.

Descriptive and evaluative research methods were utilized to answer three research questions. Foremost among the questions was to determine whether the current services are acceptable and congruent with the expectations of the residents and businesses within the fire protection district. The second query was to examine if there exist any new services or programs that the Signal Hill Fire Department should initiate in order to better serve the residents and businesses. The final query was to ascertain the potential level of voter support for a tax rate increase or a merger with an adjoining fire protection district in order to maintain or add to the current level of services provided.

In order to answer the three research questions, a survey instrument was developed and distributed via the random sampling method throughout the fire protection district. The data from the returned surveys were entered into a computer program for analysis. Several open-ended questions allowed respondents to offer additional comments in their own words.

The product of this research indicates that the community is overwhelmingly satisfied with the overall level of services presently being delivered. Furthermore, survey respondents provided an assessment of current services and future services which will warrant further examination in order to ensure customer expectations are congruent with the fire department's ability to render such services. And finally, the data collected suggests that if it is crucial to sustain current service levels, voters would endorse a funding increase.

Research of literature, journal articles and an interview were utilized to draw several conclusions of the data collected. There existed several external factors that limited or restricted the research.

However, the limitations or restrictions did not significantly alter the final product of the research.

Several recommendations were made based upon the research conducted for this project, based upon the respondent's replies and the literature reviews the Signal Hill Fire Department should endeavor to maintain and enhance its emergency response and non-emergency functions. Specific existing service levels should be sustained and if possible augmented. The addition of other services not currently provided should be further examined within the department's strategic planning process. In conclusion, any funding increase, issuance of general obligation bonds, or voter approval of merging with an adjoining fire protection district in order to preserve or enhance services, should only be initiated after communicating the necessity to the populace of the fire protection district.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	2
TABLE OFCONTENTS.....	4
INTRODUCTION.....	5
BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE.....	6
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	8
PROCEDURES.....	13
RESULTS.....	21
DISCUSSION.....	24
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	30
REFERENCES.....	38
APPENDIX A (Fire Department Services).....	40
APPENDIX B (Survey Summary).....	43
APPENDIX C (Respondent Comments).....	50
APPENDIX D (Equalized Assessed Valuation).....	52
APPENDIX E (General Fund Revenue).....	53
APPENDIX F (Incident Response).....	54
APPENDIX G (Survey Instrument).....	55

INTRODUCTION

As taxpayers, the residents and business that exist within any fire protection district serve not only as the funding mechanism for that district but as customers for the district's fire department. Consequently, each fire department has an obligation to ensure that it provides its highest level of service to those taxpayers/customers – customers who expect the highest quality of performance from their fire department, whenever emergency situations arise. In addition to emergency response operations, the department also attempts to educate its customers with fire prevention and survival skills, disaster preparedness and other matters relevant to the public welfare. Aware of the high expectations held, the Signal Hill Fire Department needed to assess the level of community satisfaction with the services it provides to the occupants of this, their fire protection district located in St. Clair County, Illinois.

Funding for the fire protection district's operations is derived from real estate property taxes, based upon the equalized assessed valuation of the property. Illinois Compiled Statutes limit the amount that the fire protection districts may levy for their funding. Since 1989, the Signal Hill Fire Protection District has been levying amounts close to the maximum rate allowed by the statutes – a maximum which may be increased, however, with the approval of the district's registered voters.

The purpose of this research project, then is three fold: first, to determine whether the current level of services provided by the Signal Hill Fire Department remains acceptable to the residents and businesses within the fire protection district. Second, to determine whether current services were compatible with customer expectations and demands. And, finally, this project would serve as a way to determine what levels of public support could be expected should the fire protection district seek voter approval of a tax-rate increase, the issuance general obligation bonds issue, or other type of referendum.

In this study, descriptive and evaluative research methods were used to attempt to answer the following specific questions:

- Are the residents and business owners of the Signal Hill Fire Protection District satisfied with the current level of services being provided to them?
- Are there any new services or programs that Signal Hill Fire Department should initiate in order to better serve the residents and businesses of the fire protection district?
- Would the voters within the Signal Hill Fire Protection District support a tax increase, the issuance of general obligation bonds, or any other referendum initiative to maintain or enhance the current level of services?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Located in southwestern Illinois and covering 5.5 square miles, the Signal Hill Fire Protection District provides emergency services to an estimated 8000 residents. The residents occupy 2530 personal domiciles while business and community institutions account for approximately 60 non-residential occupancies.

Because many residents commute to employment within the greater St. Louis, Missouri metropolitan area, the fire protection district may be described best as a “bedroom” community. The non-residential occupancies consist of the usual community institutions and suburban enterprises – specialty shops and neighborhood food marts and gasoline stations, taverns, and other types of commercial ventures. But one non-residential occupancy attracts a great large number of visitors to the community each year. Our Lady of the Snows Shrine, the largest outdoor Catholic shrine in the United States, hosts over one million visitors per year, for both secular and non-secular activities.

Under the auspices of the Illinois Compiled Statutes, the fire protection district is a legally organized unit of local government. As such, the Fire Protection District holds the authority to levy taxes with which to fund its fire protection services. These taxes are presented to the public as one element of the annual county real estate tax, calculated upon the amount equal to one-third of the fair market value of each taxable parcel of property. This amount is referred to as the equalized assessed valuation. Since the tax year 1988 the equalized assessed evaluation of the fire protection district as a whole has risen approximately one million dollars per year. (Appendix “D”) Computing this aggregate over the same ten-year period shows that the fire protection district has realized an average annual increase of \$3300.00 in its general fund. (Appendix “E”)

Illinois Compiled Statutes also allow for fire protection districts to enter into a contract for the delivery of their fire protection services. For example, under a fee for services agreement, the Signal Hill Fire Protection District contracts with the Signal Hill Fire Protection Association, Incorporated, a not-for-profit organization that owns and operates the Signal Hill Fire Department. Staffed by one career fire chief/administrator, 32 volunteer firefighters and ten associate members, the fire department provides for the direct delivery of all emergency responses operations and non-emergency programs within the fire protection district. Associate members perform support and administrative functions.

In addition, the department provides services that could be categorized as “normally associated with” a fire department operation. (Appendix “A”) The one major exception is the delivery of emergency medical services. Two private paramedic companies currently provide emergency medical services and neither the Fire Protection District nor the Fire Department subsidize or offer any a financial incentive to either medical service provider.

Since their founding in 1946, the Fire Protection District and Association have enjoyed a relationship with the residents and businesses that has been both cooperative and harmonious.

While there has never been a formal poll or canvass of the occupants to appraise services rendered by the fire department, both organizations felt that the time had come to acquire some feedback. This was necessary to determine whether both that the District and Fire Department were meeting their customer's expectations, to gather information which would allow informed and educated decisions regarding the current service levels, and to obtain information which would enable development of strategic objectives and plans designed to meet the District's future needs.

Subsequently, a survey was created and distributed to a random selection of residents and businesses. The responses from returned survey forms were then carefully analyzed to assess taxpayers' satisfaction and expectations. And finally, the survey canvassed the taxpayers regarding their support for a funding increase or other means, such as a consolidation or merger with an adjoining fire protection district, to maintain or expand current services level.

The correlation of this research project is within the National Fire Academy's Executive Leadership curriculum. Specific reference is within the scope of Unit Six, *Fostering Creativity and Innovation*, Unit Eight, *Developing Decision Making Skills*, and Unit 11, *Managing Change*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Citizens are proactive in holding public agencies much more accountable for the tax dollars those agencies expend. Because all public bodies (school districts, park districts, road districts, etc.) compete for limited tax dollars. The fire service must be prepared to deal with the ever-changing attitudes, values and beliefs of the citizens it serves. In order to keep itself abreast of those changes and to meet new

expectations fire departments should actively seek out the opinions of its customers. “Don’t wait for your citizens to come to you. Go to them!” (Lavoie, 1995)

No other public service agency appears to have gained as much approval from the public as the fire service. In a 1997 *USA TODAY* poll, 78 % of those adults surveyed said they trusted their fire department. While only 46% trusted their police departments. Evidence of this good will was acknowledged by Brunacini when he said,

They solved the problem and were nice to the citizens before, during, and after the fire. Ben’s [Franklin] basic design set the stage for virtually all subsequent American fire service development and has produced a 200-year-old love affair between the fire service and our customers. (Brunacini 1996)

Despite this public praise and appreciation, fire departments should never stop seeking to discover whether they, or in fact fulfilling, the expectations of their customers. “Assess your department’s stature in the in the community. Don’t assume anything.” (Lavoie, 1995) The apparently high public approval rating afforded the fire service does not negate a fire department’s obligation to exercise sound fiscal management. Nor should it allow the diminution or deterioration in types, caliber, or range of services it provides.

What most of this really means is that we must keep our organization moving and changing to match the needs of our customers and our department members. The current fire service environment has lots of positive and some scary challenges and opportunities. (Brunacini, 1996)

Yet “scary challenges” are nothing new. Historically, the fire service is first-on-scene whenever citizens need emergency assistance. Firefighters rescue victims, control hazards, and engage in an assortment of life saving activities, that are often life-threatening to themselves. “Based on that reality,

being a firefighter involves making a promise to the customer that we will respond to their call and do our very best.” (Brunacini, 1996)

By assuming the leading role emergency response operations, the fire service deepens its commitment to the community. Most communities expect more from their fire department, perhaps the most versatile of all emergency service agencies in terms of the services it provides in a swift and expedient manner.

While changes in technology, the current environment, our service delivery menu, and organizational complexity have created huge differences in business, the most important element has not changed – the relationship and feeling between the customer who has the problem and the firefighter who responds to solve the problem. The two become intensely involved in a very special experience that defines why we exist as a service. (Brunacini 1996)

However, in order to honor that relationship and to continue delivering the highest levels of service, development of strategic plans are critical. Without interaction with its customers, it would be unlikely for any fire department to design and implement long-range plans that would enhance the health, welfare, and safety of its community.

Service organizations perform at every level from lousy to WOW!. In most cases, lousy performance is not the result of actually planning to deliver el sucko service. More often, it is the result of not planning to deliver any particular level of service at all. (Brunacini, 1996)

Whether operating at the scene of an emergency incident, conducting tours of the engine house, interacting at community social functions, or educating children about the perils of fire, firefighters have a uniquely interactive role within the community. “Firefighters are a special part of the community and should be familiar, positive and active sight to the customers. (Brunacini, 1996)

In order to determine whether those services are being provided at a satisfactory feedback must be obtained from the customers that receive it. One method of obtaining that feedback is the utilization of a community survey. A poll is an acceptable and accurate method of measuring the public's perceptions, feelings, and impressions regarding the fire department and the services it delivers. "The most substantive reasons for doing citizen surveys are to guide planning, to evaluate programs or personnel, and to prioritize budget allocations." (Miller and Miller, 1991)

Gathering the views of the populace is only one component of a survey process. The collected data then must be correlated and then analyzed and the results must then be presented in an acceptable format in order to draw objective conclusions.

The results of community opinion surveys help managers understand how the agencies work and how performances are seen by the general public and specific groups. Many managers consequently have been able to alter agency procedures to enhance efficiency and effectiveness or to coordinate the organizations' activities to maximize public understanding. (Jones, 1985) .

It would be nearly impossible to accurately survey one hundred percent of a community in order to extract the feedback desired by the surveying organization. Too often the costs associated with distributing, collecting, collating, and analyzing surveys for vast numbers or volumes would be prohibitive. Surveys therefore, rely upon a small but representative sampling of the larger population. "In general, the most accepted sampling method involves some means of statistically random selection from the relevant population." (Jones, 1985)

Public opinion surveys have been used for more than one hundred years to predict and draw conclusions about a variety of issues. Survey research has proven to be an accurate mechanism with which to determine the preferences and dislikes of large numbers of people. At the very least, a survey

can identify strengths and weaknesses of a public safety organization by questioning its constituents or its customers.

“The citizen survey finds and gives voice to all types of citizens, the poorer as well as the better educated residents, those whose health may keep them from attending meetings and those in better health, shy people and outgoing people, newcomers and old timers, and those that have a dispassionate point of view as well as those emotionally involved. The representative sample tapped in a citizen survey provides the point of view that can be found only in the community at large.”

(Miller and Miller, 1991)

Properly constructed and executed, surveys can provide units of local government, such as fire protection districts, with accurate information regarding programs in which the constituent or customer is ultimately the end user. Such surveys can help to ensure service levels, quality of service levels, the range of services provided are congruent with customer expectations. “In addition to using citizen surveys to identify programs and policies needed or desired, local governments use citizen surveys to evaluate existing services. These are the surveys that provide the bottom line for local government.”

(Miller and Miller, 1991)

In short, surveys are an inexpensive and expedient means through which discover the public’s opinion. Results allow organizations to analyze and formulate conclusions based upon the respondent’s answers to empirical questions. “Although research data reports will not provide explicit answers to normative questions, the statistics obtained from the data contribute to a stronger basis for decision making.” (Renner, 1988).

PROCEDURES

Research Methodology

The initial focus on research methodology centered around identifying a means in which to gather the views and values of the populace of the fire protection district. The positive attributes inherent in the methodology – effective, expedient, inexpensive – rendered a survey the logical methodology of choice.

The survey was constructed with a variety of questions consisting of both independent and dependent variables. (Appendix “G”) An independent variable is defined as “The variable expected to account for (the cause of) the dependent variable.” (Frankfort-Nachmias, 1997) A dependent variable is defined as “The variable to be explained (the effect) by the researcher” (Frankfort-Nachmias, 1997)

In addition, the questions were characterized as *ordinal, nominal, or interval/ratio* in nature. Nominal data is often defined as qualitative in nature. It asks for a reply to a finite set of variables. An example could be a choice, such as – “male or female.” Ordinal data assigns a ranking order of categories extending from low to high. An example could be ranking services on a scale of 1 through 10, with 10 being an acceptable level and 1 being an unacceptable level. Interval ratio data provides for measurements for all cases that are expressed in the same units, such as age, number of years living at a specific address, etc. Designing the survey in this manner would permit for the cross comparison of selected questions. Several open-ended questions were included as well to allow respondents to reply as they wish, in their own words.

The next phase in the survey process was the selection of the best method by which to gather responses to the questions. Telephone, mail, and face-to-face interviews were considered appropriate means by which to conduct the survey, although each one of these methods reflects strengths and weaknesses in the manner in which data is collected. Telephone surveys are considered an effective research method, but to do them require additional manpower, time, and expense -- survey callers and

phone bank service, etc. And with the ever increasing popularity of unlisted or unpublished telephone numbers, telephone number portability, answering machines, caller identification devices, and wireless phone service, only complicates conducting a survey via this modality for that smaller organization with limited financial resources.

“If everyone had a telephone and were listed in the phone book, it would be easy to draw random samples of persons in various geographic units – including the entire nation.” (Stark and Roberts, 1996) But, the Signal Hill Fire Protection District is not a “stand alone” community. It is a sub-section of a larger metropolitan area and it has no “Signal Hill” telephone directory. Whats more, two separate telephone companies provide phone service within the District. This would compound the difficulty of identifying district occupants in order to develop a master telephone index. Consequently, an excessive amount of time and expense would have been required to identify a selective random telephone sampling to be used solely by inclusively for the fire protection district.

A field interview or door to door method was rejected without serious consideration. Even more manpower intensive and time consuming, participating in surveys that are conducted face-to-face, respondents are often reluctant to be completely forthright with their answers. In fact, they are often suspected of trying to tell the interviewer what they think he/she wants to hear. On the other hand, interviewers may display a self-bias by changing the manner or style in which they ask the same questions of various interview subjects. Such self-bias could skew the responses either positively or negatively based upon the presentation of questions, the order of questions, or merely a perception of the interviewer’s personal mannerisms that might be construed as offensive.

So for the purposes of this project a mailed survey was judged to be the most appropriate method. Mailed surveys are relatively inexpensive, are easy to tabulate results, and are less intrusive for the

respondents, who could complete the survey form at their leisure and were assured of the anonymity of their replies since this survey did not ask for a name or return address. “Mailed surveys that guarantee anonymity protect the respondents as much as possible from feeling pressure to record the acceptable answer.” (Miller and Miller, 1991)

After deciding on the means of the data collection, a four-page survey form was developed. The first page was a cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey and asking the recipients to be straightforward with their answers. The next three pages presented a variety of survey questions. (Appendix “G”) The survey questions were constructed to be as brief and to the point as possible, minimizing the amount of time needed to complete the form. “Questionnaires should have clear instructions, definitions, and uncluttered space. Specific questions should be as short and concise as possible.” (Renner, 1988)

The next step was to whether the survey would be mailed to the entire populace or to just a representative sampling of the fire protection district. Although printing costs of forms and envelopes was affordable, and all the labor was to be done by volunteers, the total postage for the entire populace would have exceeded \$1600.00 -- a considerable expense that would not have added much to the survey findings. “A citizen survey of 100 residents will give a precise an estimate of the sentiments of New Yorkers as the residents of Ames, Iowa, presuming all other sampling procedures are the same.” (Miller and Miller, 1991) Since little would be gained by canvassing the entire district, a representative sampling would be an appropriate and acceptable means with which to harvest research data. “In general, the most accepted sampling method involves some means of statistically random selecting from the relevant population.” (Jones, 1985)

In order to achieve that random sampling of the fire protection district residents and businesses, a systematic-interval sampling method was selected. The survey was then mailed, using first class postage, to every seventh address on the fire department's master mailing list. Selecting every seventh address would result in reaching 14% of all identified occupancies registered as capable of receiving mail within the fire protection district. "From the assembled master list, names or residences are selected through a simple but systematic procedure - selecting every hundredth, or fiftieth, or tenth resident is a common practice." (Jones, 1985) A self addressed - stamped return envelope was included for the convenience of the survey's recipients, hopefully, encouraging prompt replies.

To accelerate the analysis from the returned surveys, a computer software program was employed. This software program, SPSS Student version, was used for entering, collating and viewing data correlated with each of the respondent's answers. Each survey question was given a variable file number, and each respondent was given a case file number, (i.e. C1, C2, etc.). After the data was entered the software program was then used to compile reports, create charts and graphs, identify frequency summaries, and calculate other statistical analyses.

Limitations and Restrictions

There were no limitations or restrictions placed this project by the fire department; on the contrary, financial, administrative and operational functions of the survey process were well supported. However, several limitations were faced by the project, imposed by factors outside of the control of the fire department.

There existed a bias to the survey method selected to conduct this project. With a survey assigned to every seventh address, the total number of surveys mailed equated to fourteen percent of the total

number of mailing addresses district. While a representative sampling is an acceptable method to gather information, not every mailing address was afforded the opportunity to participate in the survey or provide their observations and opinions.

The fire department's mailing list was compiled from data obtained from several public utility services' address listings, and that data was cross-referenced with the city directory, then field checks were conducted to verify conflicting data. Since the surveys were mailed via first class mail, address correction provided by the postal service. Surveys that had been returned due to occupancy vacancies were re-addressed and mailed to the next closest numerical address, either ascending or descending, insuring that a total of 364 survey forms were eventually distributed.

The only trick here is to get an estimate of the number of survey questionnaires mailed out that did not reach the correct address. To do this, before mailing out the survey, check with the postal service to make sure "address correction requested" notation is properly placed upon the outgoing envelopes.

(Miller and Miller, 1991)

Despite concerted efforts to ensure one hundred percent accuracy of the fire department's master mailing list, two or three surveys were returned stamped "no-such-number." Like the vacant occupancies, these too were re-addressed in the same manner and re-mailed.

Non-owner occupied residences and transient-population apartment dwellers may have little or no community consciousness motivating them to respond to such a survey. The survey results indicate only a very small percentage of non-owner occupied residences returned the survey forms. 79 addresses were identified as being apartments, 21.7% of the total survey recipients. And there was only a 9.7% survey-return rate for this sub-group. (Appendix "B" data – question # 5)

Who among the respondents and within the family units actually received the mail and/or completed and returned the survey form is unknown. But, demographic data garnered from the survey indicated that all of the replies were completed by an adult, and the majority implied that they were homeowners. This appears to indicate that in each case, a “responsible party” completed the survey.

In retrospect, questions not asked also left the survey somewhat self-limiting. No attempt was made within the scope of this project to determine whether if the information contained in the survey energized residents to take any preventative safety action(s). Ninety-nine percent of the survey respondents indicated that their smoke detector(s) were working. But, no question(s) were asked to determine whether, in fact, the respondents had actually checked their smoke detectors to see if the alarms were functioning before they answered the question # 10, “Are your smoke detectors working?”

Another example of the survey’s self-limitation followed the same vain, 77 citizens replied that they have a fire extinguisher in their home. Yet, no question was asked whether their fire extinguisher remained operable or whether it had been serviced in accordance with the manufacturer’s recommendations. So the survey itself limited the fire department’s opportunity, in at least two instances, to either caution or remind residents about ways to protect their homes and families.

Although, slightly over 27.5 % percent of the survey forms were completed and returned, there is some inconsistency within the literature review whether or not the number returned sufficiently reflect a successful survey.

It is generally accepted that a well-conducted mail out/mail back survey can net a 60-70 percent response rate (however, among citizen surveys conducted in the past several years by local government, the mailed surveys averaged a 34 percent response rate.)” (Miller and Miller, 1991)

Respondents were not asked to provide their name or address, in order to insure anonymity. Neither the survey forms nor the return envelopes were “coded” to track replies from specific addresses. The return rate may have been increased had a follow-up method been applied to this project. “With follow-ups, most citizen surveys can count on a 50 percent response.” (Miller and Miller, 1991)

Another bias may lie in the perception of the fire department within the community. As noted before, the fire department enjoys a very high public approval rating. So the survey’s results may naturally reflect a more positive consensus that elicited a greater number of respondents would have resulted had the fire department established anything less its positive impression.

Furthermore, in some cases respondents either left answers blank or wrote in a question mark. When an answer to a question was not provided, no data could be entered into the computer analysis program, but the absence was noted within the survey results as “missing data and/or no response.”

There are several reasons perhaps why respondents fail to provide answers. First, “Respondents are especially prone to unreliable responses when the question is essentially irrelevant to them.” (Stark and Roberts, 1996) Additionally, “A second major source of unreliability in survey research is asking people questions they won’t answer or honestly won’t answer.” (Stark and Roberts, 1996)

Since the missing data accounted for only a small percentage of the survey questions, it would be unlikely to distort or prejudice the findings of the survey. Question # 24 was the exception was however. Despite some “missing data/no responses” for this question enough respondents did reply to formulate some conclusions. “Remember, Gallup predicts the voting behavior of 100 million Americans based upon the responses from under .002 percent of them.” (Miller and Miller, 1991)

An April 1, 1999 telephone interview was conducted with Mr. Phillip Schaeman, President of Tri-Data Corporation, a consulting business that contracts with cities and other units of government

regarding fire service issues. Mr. Schaeman was asked several questions regarding survey question number 24. Question 24 asked respondents to select which services they thought the fire department *currently furnished*, and what services they thought the fire department *should provide*.

Mr. Schaeman stated that his experience has taught that the public does not always understand the more difficult “technical” aspects regarding specific fire department services. In general terms, the public expects short response times and expects the fire department to “handle” their problems. “The firefighter has always been perceived who can help when there is danger. Traditionally, the one source of help that comes to mind when a situation appears to be helpless has been the fire department.”

(Hoetmer, 1996)

Even though some isolated responses were withheld, a majority of the surveys were returned within several days after mailing the survey. But, the return rate then slowed significantly. And so in order to begin analyzing survey data, it was necessary to establish a cut-off date for the return of surveys. A thirty-day time frame was allocated for the return of the survey forms. Still, all data reported for this project was received within this thirty-day period. Several surveys were returned after the thirty-day period expired and that data was entered into the data analysis computer program for future reference. However, a cursory review of the data received after the deadline did not reveal any major or significant changes in the findings as reported within this project.

RESULTS

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question 1. Are the residents and business owners of the Signal Hill Fire Protection District satisfied with the current level of services being provided to them?

Survey respondents were asked to indicate their overall perception of the current levels of services provided by the Signal Hill Fire Department, regardless of whether they had received emergency services or not. Seventy-five percent of the respondents indicated that they were “greatly satisfied” with the current services provided. Three percent said that they were “somewhat satisfied,” and 13.9 % percent said that “satisfied.” There were seven and nine-tenths percent no response.

Not one respondent answered that he/she was “somewhat dissatisfied” or “greatly dissatisfied” with the current level of services.

Two other two-part questions included in the survey also attempted to evaluate direct and/or indirect delivery of emergency services by the Signal Hill Fire Department. First, respondents were asked whether if they or a member of their family had ever received emergency services from the Signal Hill Fire Department, and 22 respondents indicated that they or a member of their family had in fact been a direct recipient. They were then asked to rate the quality of services provided directly to them and 81% indicated that they were “greatly satisfied.”

Second, respondents were asked whether neighbors, friends or relatives had ever received emergency services from the Signal Hill Fire Department -- 38 respondents replied that their neighbors, friends or relatives had indeed received emergency services. And, when asked to relate the quality of those services reported to them, 85 % that the emergency service recipients were “greatly satisfied” with the delivery of services.

The responses to these two questions also indicated a high level of satisfaction with the direct and/or indirect delivery of emergency services. Combined with the results of the “overall perception” query, it would appear that the respondents are overwhelmingly satisfied with the current level of services being provided by the Signal Hill Fire Department.

Research Question 2. Are there any new services or programs that Signal Hill Fire Department should initiate in order to better serve the residents and businesses of the fire protection district?

Respondents were presented with a series of eleven emergency and non-emergency services from which to select. The Signal Hill Fire Department currently provides a majority of the services to some degree, but several others are not provided at all. (Appendix “A”) Space was also allotted for respondents to enter “additional” comments.

Five of the services listed were almost equally divided between an affirmative selection and a “missing data/no response;” these were: Emergency Medical Services, C.P.R Training, Home Fire Prevention Inspections, Business Fire Prevention Inspections, and Fire Safety Classes.

Four selections -- Roadway Rescue, Fire Extinguisher Classes, Blood Pressure Checks, and Disaster Preparedness Classes -- experienced a higher number of “missing/no response data” designations.

And, two selections received a significant level of support. Fire Suppression and Severe Storm Alerts (Warning Sirens) appeared to carry considerable weight in the opinions of the respondents. Severe Storm Alerts actually received the highest positive rating, as correlated with the lowest missing/no response, in aggregate data.

Appendix “B” provides a summary to responses of all of the surveys that were returned, processed and analyzed.

Research Question 3. Would the voters within the Signal Hill Fire Protection District support a tax increase, the issuance of general obligation bonds, or other referendum initiative to maintain, or enhance the current level of services?

Sixty-eight percent of the respondents indicated that they would support a funding increase in order to maintain the current level of fire protection services; 17.8 % of the respondents stated that they would not support a funding increase; and there were 14 cases of missing data/no response. Respondents were slightly less supportive of a funding increase to add or enhance the current level of services. Survey results indicated that support for such a proposition was 55.4 % in favor; 25.7 % opposed; and 18.8 % with no reply.

Respondents were questioned twice about their views regarding the merger or consolidation with an adjoining fire protection district. The first question asked whether Signal Hill should merge or consolidate in order to maintain the current level of services. Fifty-two and five-tenths percent of those answering the survey indicated that they would support merging or consolidating with an adjoining fire protection district; 22.8 % stated that they were not in favor of such a proposal; and 25 cases did not reply.

When asked if they would support merging or consolidating to increase or fortify current levels of service, 52.3 % percent indicated that they would endorse such a proposal; 24.8% stated that they would not support merging or consolidating with an adjoining fire protection district; 22.8% of the respondents did not reply to the question.

DISCUSSION

As Chief of the Signal Hill Fire Department, and Administrator for the Signal Hill Fire Protection District, I began this project with some tentative assumptions regarding the organizations' standing within the community. I believed the fire department, its firefighters, administrators, boards, committees,

support personnel, and associated stakeholders are all stewards in providing a very essential and indispensable community service. But, before this survey was completed, there had been no authoritative means to corroborate or invalidate even an educated guess about the community's viewpoint. So I was pleased to learn that the fire department does enjoy a very high approval rating in both the type and quality of services it provides. The survey's results validate assumptions or hypothesis regarding the fire department's standing in the community.

However, I was somewhat disappointed with the number of surveys returned. While the return rate fell within acceptable norms, I had anticipated a much higher response ratio. Inclusion of the several demographic questions did however assist with establishing that respondents' answers were fairly consistent regardless, of age, sex, number of years residing in the fire protection district, etc. "Demographic information is always significant in survey research, as it provides a profile of the respondents and serves as a reference against which to check population norms." (Buchman and Lazzari, 1994)

Another journal article referenced for this project was *Polls try to take the pulse of the populace, but how true is the reading?* by Debra Goldman for *ADWEEK*. Ms. Goldman suggests that separate polls covering the same issue can be swayed over the course of several weeks based upon national events such as crises or catastrophes. What's more, she seems to say that the same survey, taken *after* a well-publicized emergency response, may have elicited either a greater response return-rate or different respondent comments. Fortunately, the fire department has not been the lead agency in a well-publicized incident for some time. In reality, that fact may have given this survey a more accurate reading of the respondents true feelings, without being overshadowed by the "halo effect" of a successful major incident.

The Signal Hill Fire Department has always attempted to address the needs of the community -- within the scope of readily available resources. And, it would appear that the fire department has been fairly successful with its efforts, even though available resources include personnel availability and finances may limit the scope of the services provided and offered.

The fire department should recognize that value that providing programs and services beyond the “basic” levels. “Several top-rated departments offered CPR training and public education, but fire departments at the bottom of the scale did not.” (Miller and Miller, 1991) “These top rated volunteer and combination departments offered more special services than the volunteer departments at the bottom of the list.” (Miller and Miller, 1991)

At the same time, others, outside of our customer base, will continually affect fire department emergency and non-emergency functions. For example, agencies of federal, state or local governments influence our daily activities. Whether it is an Occupational Health and Safety Respiratory Protection Standard, a State of Illinois Blood Borne Pathogen protocol, or simply the dispatching fees assessed by St. Clair County beginning in 1995, all have impacted the financial resources and operational functions of the fire department.

The National Fire Protection Association’s develops and publishes consensus standards that are recognized nationally by many fire service organizations and government bodies. These standards cover; apparatus and equipment, personal protective clothing or a myriad of other codes to which the fire department attempts to conform. As new standards are issued and others are revised, each has increased the cost of providing basic level of services to our customers.

The cost of educating and training firefighters grows increasingly higher as well. In addition to basic firefighting skills, today’s firefighters need to be trained in hazardous-materials response, weapons of

mass destruction, disaster mitigation, confined-space awareness and a multiple of other areas of specialized response and thus adds to the cost for such increasingly sophisticated training.

Such increases are over-and-above normal financial depreciation tables, amortization schedules and regular maintenance costs. So while, it is nearly impossible to predict what operational costs will do in the near or long term future, it should be anticipated that such costs will continue to increase significantly. And thus, planning for such increases should be given serious consideration in any master planning effort.

In their 1991 report *Citizen Surveys, How to Do Them, How to Use Them, What They Mean*, for the International City Managers Association, Miller and Miller reported on the per capita cost for fire department operations. "Per capita costs were very low in small communities without paid firefighters, averaging \$29.00 per capita." (Miller and Miller, 1991) With an estimated population of 8000, the Signal Hill Fire Protection District's current general fund of \$176,000.00 yields a per capita ratio of twenty-two dollars, even in 1991 dollars this current ratio appears to be well below at least one nationally recognized authoritative source.

I have reached the opinion that additional financial resources must be made available to the fire department if its is to merely sustain its current levels of operations. The department has been able to absorb some increased operational costs in the past, but that ability has come at the expenses of at the expense of delaying or scaling down projects. It is only a matter of time before "doing more with less" will finally equate to "doing less with less." And, the potential results of "doing less with less" could certainly have a negative impact on the satisfaction level of the fire department's customers. For negative images, perceptions, or opinions could easily escalate into a downward spiral for the fire department, from which there could be no recovery.

“This is not to say that every dollar spent on fire protection was worth a certain number of ‘opinion points,’ but at the extremes of citizens ratings the best fire departments put lots of more money into fire services than the worst.” (Miller and Miller, 1991)

Fire departments, like any other emergency response service provider, need modern equipment and updated training to be most effective. But that equipment and training requires money and fire protection districts are established, funded and operated under the statutes of the State of Illinois. In essence, they are government-controlled monopolies that provide an indispensable community service under tightly controlled budgets.

Equally important is the fact that many citizens that are served by a fire protection district have no other option available to provide service to them for a fire emergency. Simply put, there is no competition for most fire protection district to face when it comes to quality, types, levels or diversity of services it affords to its citizens. This is not necessarily the case with Signal Hill.

The Signal Hill Fire Protection District adjoins the City of Belleville to the north and east, in the past, the City of Belleville has annexed parcels away from Signal Hill. When an annexation occurs, the fire protection district loses its share of the real estate tax revenues generated that had been generated from the annexed parcel. The City of Belleville assumes the responsibility for fire protection, but Signal Hill’s equalized assessed valuation is diminished leaving fewer taxable parcels to fund fire protection services. “Since Belleville Township is coterminous with the City of Belleville, existing townships and township road districts, in addition to volunteer fire districts, will experience a loss of revenue should annexation occur.” (Route 15 Corridor Development Plan, 1996)

On the other hand, should the Signal Hill Fire Department fail to meet customer expectations in the delivery of fire protection services, residents have the option of annexing a portion or the entire

community into the City of Belleville. “Failing to meet the expectations of its residents” could encompass a range of services. And, a lower public protection grading used by the insurance industry in determining insurance premiums – the types of services, level of service and/or quality of services offered could be cited as examples of what residents could insist upon. “Fire Departments face public pressure to develop and provide services wisely and are increasingly recognizing the significance of tailoring services for the unique and changing needs of their communities.” (Buchman and Lazzari, 1994)

In addition, the Illinois Compiled Statutes provide that voters can dissolve a fire protection district at any time with a referendum or transfer to an adjacent fire protection district. (ILCS 706/15 and ICLS 705/15a) Consequently, Signal Hill needs to remain cognizant of the fact that, unlike other fire protection districts, the residents of our fire protection district do have a choice as to what agency provides their fire protection services.

It is also important to remember that the term “satisfactory,” as utilized in the survey, is recognized a subjective term. Satisfactory may or may not mean the same to two or more people. However, it’s obvious that in the survey question design, there had to be a term with which to gauge respondents’ feelings and views regarding their overall opinion of the service level. Therefore, the term “satisfactory” was designated as the base upon which to describe one’s impressions of the fire department.

For the most part, I suspect that fire departments are publicly recognized more for their emergency response operations than for their non-emergency functions. While this recognition may amplify the fire department’s public image, I believe it is the “other” things we do -- is what actually fortify our standing within the community. Those “other” things are public education in our school, a community newsletter, participation in the chili cook-off and earth day activities at the Shrine. Fire prevention hand outs -- stamped with our name, junior firefighter badges, or changing the battery of a senior’s smoke detector

help to further enhance and fortify our image and commitment to serve. The mere act of being highly visible in every neighborhood throughout the fire protection district can also contribute to the public's perception of who we are and what we do. These types of activities are very valuable, and every effort should be made to affirm their value and sustain their importance.

The fire department has been unproductive, unfortunately, when it comes to tracking or recording non-emergency services or functions. This is contrary to the documentation of emergency response activities. Documentation of non-emergency services or functions should be just as diligent as documentation of emergency activities. This is particularly true with public relations events. Such records would be most useful in estimating the number of people, both residents and non-residents of the fire protection district, who are impacted or influenced by the fire department's role as a positive information resource.

There was probably enough data amassed from the survey instrument used on this project to develop and analyze an entire applied research project which centers around just one of the research questions contained herein.

But if I were to summarize a central theme for this project it would be: Throughout this nation's history, the local fire department has been the single source of unfailing, ever present help whenever the citizens of our communities need emergency assistance. Fire departments continue with one of this country's rich, time-honored traditions — neighbor helping neighbor in time of need.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Research Question 1. Are the residents and business owners of the Signal Hill Fire Protection District satisfied with the current level of services being provided to them?

Respondents were very strong and explicit regarding their satisfaction level with the Signal Hill Fire Department. Not one respondent replied that they were “dissatisfied,” either “somewhat” or “greatly,” with the current service levels. This finding coincides with those presented to the International City Management Association. “The best rated [community] services were fire...” (Miller and Miller, 1991)

Respondents also added positive comments regarding their degree of contentment with the fire department. (Appendix “C”)

- “I feel like the Signal Hill fire department [is a] “top-notch” organization, and has been for years. This household will support anything the department needs to do to continue to maintain and upgrade current standards in fire protection and emergency services.” (Case # 26)
- “I admire the performance of you firefighters.” (Case # 33)
- “... I think our fire protection district is fine as is. As I said above, I believe our Signal Hill Fire Depart. does an excellent job.” (Case # 55)
- “It appears you are always looking for ways to improve your services – for this I am grateful.” (Case # 69)
- “We are very proud of our fire department and respectfully we hope we will never need your services. You should be commended for all your efforts.” (Case #72)

It is recommended therefore, that the Signal Hill Fire Department continue its endeavors to maintain and to enhance its emergency and non-emergency functions within the fire protection district. The fire department should also formulate a strategy promote and to maintain positive profile and high visibility within the fire protection district. “I don’t know of any progressive department that is resting on its own laurels, maintaining the status quo.” (Hoetmer, 1996)

In order to sustain a preeminent level of customer satisfaction, it is further recommended that the fire department establish a community advisory board to counsel both the fire department and fire protection district to ensure that the service levels are congruent with the expectations of the residents/taxpayers. Such an advisory board should be autonomous from any existing fire department or fire protection district committee and provide at least an annual assessment of its findings.

Consideration should also be granted to identifying a method with which to establish an on-going means of continually monitoring the fire department's standing within the community.

Research Question 2. Are there any new services or programs that Signal Hill Fire Department should initiate in order to better serve the residents and businesses of the fire protection district?

The survey referenced eleven service issues and respondents were afforded the opportunity and space to provide their own observations or comments. As noted in the *Results* section, five selections were almost equally divided between to affirmative replies and missing/no response. These were -- Emergency Medical Services, C.P.R Training, Home Fire Prevention Inspections, Business Fire Prevention Inspections, and Fire Safety Classes.

It is recommended that the fire department research four of these -- C.P.R Training, Home Fire Prevention Inspections, Business Fire Prevention Inspections, and Fire Safety Classes -- to whether they should be enhanced, updated, or augmented by other services.

In addition, legal counsel should be sought regarding the issue of Home Fire Prevention Inspections, to insure that the fire department does not violate any applicable state or local statute, should this service be added to the array of services the department currently provides. Should additional research findings

indicate the enhancement of these services is viable, funding to support them should be included within the fire department's budgetary request(s) and strategic planning initiatives.

The issue of emergency medical services is a much more complex matter. Currently, two private emergency medical service companies provide both basic life support and paramedic services. These companies are assigned to the fire protection district as a primary and back-up by the St. Clair County Emergency Services Telephone Board (i.e. 9-1-1). Additionally, there are several other private emergency medical service providers in adjacent communities and fire protection districts that provide a reserve resource to the primary and secondary services. And there are currently no financial obligations on the part of the fire department to any emergency medical provider.

To assume the primary responsibility for emergency medical services would place a heavy burden on the current financial commitment to the training/educational, apparatus and equipment of costs the fire department. Not to mention the burden such operational requirements would certainly place on existing volunteer personnel at this time.

Whether local fire departments should provide EMS depends on factors such as the community's needs and wishes, the resource capability of the locality, the political impact of the decision, and the attitude of the fire department that is to undertake the additional responsibility. (Hoetmer, 1996)

Therefore, it is recommended that Signal Hill identify emergency medical services as a "major" issue in any its strategic planning initiatives. At the very least, any strategic plan should have a contingency clause in the event the current emergency medical providers cease operation or would require a financial subsidy in order to maintain functional.

Four of the survey's service selections -- Roadway Rescue, Fire Extinguisher Classes, Blood Pressure Checks, and Disaster Preparedness Classes -- reported high numbers of missing/no response

data. Roadway Rescue and Fire Extinguisher Classes are currently being furnished. It would be difficult to discontinue roadway rescue based solely upon the opinions of those that did respond to the survey. Besides, the fire department is the best trained and equipped to deliver this service. Fire extinguisher training is provided to the businesses and health care occupancies within the fire protection district – potentially life-saving public education, provided at very little cost to fire department to offer this service. It is therefore recommended that the fire department continue its roadway rescue operations and fire extinguisher training drills to commercial occupancies. No action is recommended regarding Blood Pressure Checks at this time.

Disaster Preparedness information can increase personal survival in the case of either natural or man-made disaster. (Render, 1998) Distribution of the fire department's newsletter, *Hot Flashes*, should be continued in order to convey pre-disaster information to the community.

Fire Suppression and Severe Storm Alerts also ranked very high in the opinions of the survey recipients. Obviously, fire suppression operations are the primary reason for the organization's existence. Needless to say, the fire department should continue to provide this service.

However, the current use of only a single warning siren for severe weather does limit the department's ability to adequately alert citizens to potentially dangerous and destructive weather conditions. It is therefore recommended that serious consideration be granted to the installation and operation of an outdoor severe-weather warning system throughout the fire protection district.

Research Question 3. Would the voters within the Signal Hill Fire Protection District support a tax increase, the issuance of general obligation bonds, or other referendum initiative to maintain, or enhance the current level of services?

The fire protection district's boundaries are finite. Construction of residential dwellings and commercial developments that add to the equalized assessed valuation has seen a slight increase over the past ten years. (Appendix "D") In fact, the fire protection district has realized an increase of approximately thirty-three hundred dollar per year increase in property tax revenues from new housing construction or commercial development. (Appendix "E")

But, during this same ten-year time period, requests for emergency services have vacillated from year to year. Emergency responses have been as low as 101 in 1993 to a peak of 212 just three years later, in 1996. However, a line graph chart does reflect that trends for emergency response operations have seen a steady rise, despite fluctuations, from year to year. (Appendix "F") Requests for emergency services have also diversified to encompass a variety of responses almost unheard of ten years ago.

Secondly, we still don't have much effective capability (or interest) to screen out requests for service.

Given our basic concern for the customer's welfare along with today's screwy legal/liability environment and basic pessimistic approach, if the caller says they need help, we send it. (Brunacini, 1996)

One example of such commitment would be responding to a citizen request to check for carbon monoxide in a residence, In 1989 type of response was unheard of; today, it's this is perceived and handled as a "routine" incident. Costs for procuring carbon monoxide monitoring equipment totaled approximately \$2500.00. Budgetary costs to maintain and calibrate this unit are approximately \$1200.00 annually. Furthermore, even the less sophisticated back-up detection equipment also requires annual upkeep compounding maintenance expenses.

Unfunded mandates by the federal, state and local governments have also increased the costs of providing basic levels of service. If history is any gauge, these mandates will most likely continue to increase the operational and administrative expenditures for the fire service.

While survey results suggested that respondents would favorably support a funding increase to maintain the current level of fire protection services, the second highest level of support applied to a funding increase that would add to or fortify the current service levels.

Survey data indicated that merging or consolidating with an adjoining fire protection district was not as popular as a funding increase. What's more, several respondents commented that merging or consolidation fire protection districts should only be considered as a last resort. (Appendix "C")

Therefore, in order to continue to provide a high level of quality service, it is recommended that the Signal Hill Fire Protection District consider a real estate tax increase to the general fund levy. In order to muster support from all of the fire district's taxpayers, it is essential to convey the rationale behind such a tax increase. "Establish programs to educate citizens on a continual basis of the ramifications if service demands continue to increase without more resources. Something has to give!" (Lavoie, 1995)

Additionally, it should be acknowledged that the fire protection district is only one of many units of local government that assess property taxes, and that these other taxing bodies may also be competing for increased real estate tax revenues. Yet, the marketing the fire protection district's requirements should not be overlooked. "Because of the increase demand for our services and decreases in available funding, we must become aggressive marketers within our communities. Let the community know you provide quality service so they will be willing to support it." (Bruegman, 1991)

Additional Recommendations:

The Signal Hill Fire Department has been publishing a community newsletter for nearly 18 years. Since 1994, the newsletter has been published and mailed, via bulk rate mail, three times per year. This newsletter has been designed to convey fire prevention tips, fire survival skills, disaster preparedness advice and other life-safety information. It also contains information about the fire department and firefighting personnel. “Communicate, communicate, communicate, both internally (within the department) and externally (in the community).” (Lavoie, 1995) In order to determine whether the newsletter was having a positive impact within the community, a portion of the survey inquired about the newsletter. Survey results indicate that respondents did recall receiving the newsletter and have found that the information contained therein has increased their family’s safety. Therefore, it is recommended that the Signal Hill Fire Department continue to publish its community newsletter. In fact, consideration should be given to increasing the number of issues from three to four annually. Additionally, the community newsletter should reinforce fire safety behaviors and practices. Use of this medium should not be overlooked as an effective means to convey the fire department’s message to its customer base.

The results of the survey also indicate that respondents do indeed have “certain expectations” about the variety of services that should be provided by the Signal Hill Fire Department. So, it is recommended that the Signal Hill Fire Department commence upon a comprehensive planning process to ensure that the types and level of the services it currently provides are congruent with the customer’s expectations. Where customer expectations currently exceed, or are incompatible with, the fire department’s current services, consideration should be granted to examine whether such services should be upgraded or inaugurated. Whatever the response, concern for the community’s viewpoint should remain a top priority.

The information gained is essential to a department's strategic planning efforts, as well as beneficial to the community at large. While a community clearly depends on its fire department to ensure its safety, at the same time fire departments can be much more effective and efficient if they are aware of the perceptions and ideas of community members. (Buchman and Lazzari, 1994)

Still, acknowledge of the financial consideration for establishing any new program or service should not be omitted from the community conversation. The fire department's concerns or reservations regarding the funding of such programs should be openly and strongly conveyed to the citizens of the fire protection district. "With today's economy and competition for funds, most fire departments need all the support they can get. The use of emergency listings/activity highlights might significantly improve your department's public awareness and enhance its fund raising abilities." (Thompson, 1993)

Finally, it is recommended that a means be implemented with which to document non-emergency functions, services and programs. For such records would be invaluable to the budgetary, public relations and planning functions.

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Appendix “A”

Services Currently Provided

Fire Suppression

Structure

Vehicle

Trees, Grass & Brush

Refuse, Trash

Over Pressures or Ruptures

Rescue

Inhalator, Oxygen

Emergency Medical – at First Responder Level

Lock in

Search

Extrication – highway rescue

Other

 Confined Space – Awareness Level

 No High or Low Angle

 No Swift Water

 No Heavy Technical

Hazardous Condition

Spill and Leaks

No bomb search or removal

Excessive Heat

Power Line Down

Arcing or Shorted Power Equipment

No Aircraft Standby

Chemical Emergency – Limited to Awareness Level

Other Hazardous Conditions

Service Call

Lock Outs – Structure Only, no automobile

No Water Removal

Smoke or Odor Removal – Limited

Animal Rescue – Depending on Circumstances

Assist Police – Depending on Circumstances

Unauthorized Burning

Cover Assignment, Move Ups & Standby

Other Service

Good Intent

- Smoke Scare
- Controlled Burning
- Vicinity Alarm
- Steam Mistaken for Smoke
- Other Good Intent

False Alarms

- Malicious/Mischievous
- Bomb Scare - Consultation Only
- System Malfunction
- Unintentional

Mutual Assistance

- Automatic Aid
- Mutual Aid

Non-Emergency Services

Fire Prevention Inspections

- Commercial/Business – Limited
- No Residential
- New Commercial/Business Construction – Limited

Public Education

- Schools – Groups, Handouts, Fire Safety House & Engine House Tours
- Civic Groups – Upon Invitation
- Fire Extinguisher Training – Business Only
- Community Newsletter – 3 times per year
- New Resident Packets

Community Relations

- New Resident Packets
- Community Newsletter
- Engine house Birthday Parties
- Engine House Tours
- Neighborhood Outings
- Other – Earth Day, Youth Day, etc.

Other

C.P.R. – Limited to Fire Department Personnel and Families

Fire Department Training and Education

In-House

Local Level

State Level

National Level

Warning Siren – 1 @ Engine House, limited range

Membership

Local Committees and Boards

State Boards – Governor's Hazardous Materials Advisory Board

Professional Associations

Local

Regional

State

National

A:/Appendix

Appendix "B"

Survey Summarization

- 1) Age – Mean Age – 56.7959 years
 Median Age - 55.0000 years
 Range – 23 – 96 years
 Missing/No Response - 3

- 2) Sex – Male - 54 – 53.5%
 Female – 44 – 43.6%
 Missing/No Response – 3 – 3%

- 3) Number of years at current address
 Mean - 16.9208 years
 Median – 12.0000 years
 Range – 1 – 74 years
 Missing/No Response - 0

- 4) Including yourself, please indicate the number of people that reside in your home.
 Mean - 2.4694
 Median - 2.000
 Range – 1 – 6
 Missing/No Response – 3.

- 5) Do you:
 Own my home, condominium – 87 – 86.1%
 Rent my home – 4 – 4.0%
 Rent an apartment or condominium - 10 – 9.9%
 Missing/No Response - 0

- 6) Prior to receiving this survey, did you know the name of your fire department?
 Yes - 97 – 96%
 No – 3 – 3%
 Missing/No Response - 1 – 1%

- 7) The Signal Hill Fire Department is staffed by:
 Volunteer Firefighters – 53 – 52.3%
 Paid Firefighters – 3 – 3.0%
 Both Paid and Volunteer Firefighters – 30 – 29.7%
 Don't Know – 13 – 12.9%
 Missing/No Response – 2 – 2.0%

8) The Signal Hill Fire Department currently has an Insurance Classification rating of

1 – 2 – 2.0%
 2 – 1 – 1.0%
 3 – 3 – 3.0%
 4 – 11 – 10.9%
 5 – 3 – 3.0%
 6 – 1 – 1.0%
 7 – 0
 8 – 0
 9 – 1 – 1.0%
 10 – 4 – 4.0%
 Don't Know – 65 – 64.4%
 Missing/No Response – 9 – 8.9%

9) Does your home have smoke detectors?

Yes - 99 – 98.0%
 No – 2 – 2.0%
 Missing/No Response -
 How Many 2.48 (Mean)

10) Are your smoke detectors working?

Yes – 96 – 99%
 No – 1 - 1.0%
 Missing/No Response – 4 – 4.0%

11) Does your home have a fire and burglar alarm that is monitored by an alarm service company?

Yes - 35 – 34.7%
 No – 63 – 62.4%
 Missing/No Response – 3 – 3%

12) How many times a year do you check your smoke detectors?

Mean - 2.4000
 Median – 2.000
 Range - 1 – 12 times per year
 Missing/No Response – 11

13) How many times a year does your fire and burglar alarm Service Company checks, clean and adjust your alarm system?

Mean – 1.6471
 Median – 2.000
 Range – 1 – 4 times per year
 Missing/No Response – 84

14) Does your home have a carbon monoxide detector?

Yes – 45 – 44.6%

No – 55 – 54.5 %

Missing/No Response – 1 – 1.0%

15) Do you have fire extinguishers in your home?

Yes – 77 – 76.2%

No – 24 – 23.8%

Missing/No Response - 0

16) Do you recall ever receiving *Hot Flashes* – a community newsletter from the Signal Hill Fire Department?

Yes – 84 – 83.2%

No – 16 – 15.8%

Missing/No Response – 1 – 1.0%

17) I have read *Hot Flashes* and used some of the information to increase my family's safety?

Yes – 76 – 75.2%

No – 18 – 17.3%

Missing/No Response – 7 – 6.9%

18) How many times a year should Hot Flashes be published?

Mean – 3.4848

Median - 4.00

Range – 1 – 12 times per year

Missing/No Response – 35

19) Does your home have a fireplace?

Yes - 57 – 56.4%

No - 41 – 40.6%

Missing/No Response – 3 – 3%

20) If # 19 is yes -- is it cleaned annually?

Yes – 23 – 22.8%

No – 29 – 28.7%

Missing/No Response – 49 – 48.5%

21) Fire Prevention Week is in

September – 12 - 11.9%

February – 2 – 2.0%

April – 2 – 2.0%

October – 24 – 23.8%

Don't Know – 53 – 52.5%

Missing/No Response – 8 – 7.9%

22) Have you, or a member of your family ever-received emergency services from the Signal Hill Fire Department.

Yes – 22 – 21.8%

No – 76 – 75.2%

Missing/No Response – 3 – 3.0%

If Yes - Please rate the quality of services you received

Greatly satisfied – 22 – 21.8% (Valid 81.5%)

Somewhat satisfied – 5 – 5.0% (Valid 18.5%)

Satisfied – 0

Somewhat Dissatisfied – 0

Greatly Dissatisfied – 0

Missing/No Response – 74 – 73.3%

23) Have any of your neighbors, friends or relatives have ever received emergency services from the Signal Hill Fire Department?

Yes – 38 – 37.6%

No – 48 – 47.5%

Missing/No Response – 15 – 14.9%

If Yes - Please rate the quality of services observed by are reported too you.

Greatly satisfied – 35 – 34.7% (Valid 85.4%)

Somewhat satisfied – 6 – 5.9% (Valid 14.6%)

Satisfied – 0

Somewhat Dissatisfied - 0

Greatly Dissatisfied – 0

Missing/No Response – 60 – 59.4%

24) To the best of my knowledge, the Signal Hill Fire Department provides the following services. Please check all that apply.

Fire Suppression

Currently Provides – 52 - 51.5% (Valid 86.7%)

Should Provide – 4 – 4.0% (Valid 6.7%)

Currently & Should – 4 – 4.0% (Valid 6.7%)

Missing/No Response – 41 – 40.6%

Emergency Medical Services

Currently Provides – 42 – 41.6% (Valid 77.8%)

Should Provide – 10 – 9.9% (Valid 18.5%)

Currently & Should – 2 – 2.0% (Valid 3.7%)

Missing/No Response – 47 – 46.5%

Roadway Rescue

Currently Provides – 31 – 30.7% (Valid 73.8%)

Should Provide – 10 – 9.9% (Valid 23.8%)

Currently & Should – 1 – 1.0% (Valid 2.4%)

Missing/No Response – 59 – 58.4%

CPR Training

Currently Provides – 32 – 31.7% (Valid 62.7%)

Should Provide – 18 – 17.8% (Valid 35.3%)

Currently & Should – 1 – 1.0% (Valid 2.0%)

Missing/No Response – 50 – 49.5%

Home Fire Prevention Inspections

Currently Provides – 29 – 28.7% (Valid 59.2%)

Should Provide – 18 – 17.8% (Valid 36.7%)

Currently & Should – 2 – 2.0% (Valid 4.1%)

Missing/No Response – 52 – 51.5%

Business Fire Prevention Inspections

Currently Provides – 31 – 30.7% (Valid 66.0%)

Should Provide – 13 – 12.9% (Valid 27.7%)

Currently & Should – 3 – 3.0% (Valid 6.4%)

Missing/No Response – 54 – 53.5%

Fire Extinguisher Classes

Currently Provides – 19 – 18.8% (46.3%)

Should Provide – 22 – 21.8% (Valid 53.7%)

Currently & Should – 0

Missing/No Response – 60 – 59.4%

Blood Pressure Checks

Currently Provides – 9 – 8.9% (Valid 36.0%)

Should Provide – 16 – 15.8% (Valid 64.0%)

Currently & Should – 0

Missing/No Response – 76 – 75.2%

Fire Safety Classes

Currently Provides – 31 – 30.7% (Valid 59.6%)

Should Provide – 20 – 19.8% (Valid 38.5%)

Currently & Should – 1 – 1.0% (Valid 1.9%)

Missing/No Response – 52 – 51.5%

Disaster Preparedness Classes

Currently Provides – 17 – 16.8% (Valid 44.7%)

Should Provide – 21 – 20.8% (Valid 55.3%)

Currently & Should – 0

Missing/No Response – 63 – 62.4%

Severe Storm Alerts

Currently Provides – 40 – 39.6% (Valid 61.5%)

Should Provide – 23 – 22.8% (Valid 35.4%)

Currently & Should – 2 – 2.0% (Valid 3.1%)

Missing/No Response – 36 – 35.6%

Other please specify – See Appendix “C”

25) Would you support a funding increase to maintain the current level of fire protection services?

Yes – 69 – 68.3%

No – 18 – 17.8%

Missing/No Response – 14 – 13.9%

26) Would you support funding for additional or enhancements to the current level of fire protection services?

Yes – 56 – 55.4%

No – 26 – 25.7%

Missing/No Response – 19 – 18.8%

27) I have supported the Signal Hill Fire Department's annual fund raising activity – Firefighters Ribs and Raffle Day at least once in the last 3 years?

Yes – 79 – 78.2%

No – 20 – 19.8%

Missing/No Response – 2 – 2.0%

28) I would consider becoming a volunteer firefighter?

Yes – 1 – 1.0%

No – 92 – 91.1%

Missing/No Response – 8 – 7.9%

29) At present, I personally know a Signal Hill volunteer firefighter?

Yes – 41 – 40.6%

No – 54 – 53.5%

Missing/No Response – 6 – 5.9%

30) Would you support a merger or consolidation with an adjoining fire protection district to maintain the current level of fire protection services?

Yes – 53 – 52.5%

No – 23 – 22.8%

Missing/No Response – 25 – 24.8%

31) Would you support a merger or consolidation with an adjoining fire protection district for additional or enhancements to the current level of fire protection services?

Yes – 53 – 52.3%

No – 25 – 24.8%

Missing/No Response – 23 – 22.8%

32) Regardless if you have ever received emergency services or not, please provide your overall perception of the current services provided by the Signal Hill Fire Department.

Greatly satisfied – 76 – 75.2%

Somewhat satisfied – 3 – 3.0 %

Satisfied – 14 – 13.9%

Somewhat Dissatisfied - 0

Greatly Dissatisfied – 0

Missing/No Response - 8 – 7.9%

Please provide any additional comments you would like to offer. -- See Appendix “C”

A:/survey/return

Appendix “C”

Respondent Comments

C4 – “New resident to Illinois -- Don’t know much about your department.”

C18 – “By insurance, fire rating -- good!”

C26 – “I feel like the Signal Hill fire department “top-notch” organization, and has been for years.

This household will support anything the department needs to do to continue to maintain and upgrade current standards in fire protection and emergency services. Thank you!”

24) “How about a babysitting course that trains in CPR and fire safety.”

“If you offer fire extinguisher class, I would want to actually use”
the extinguisher. I’ve read directions, but never used one.”

“How about a street number inspection? If you couldn’t tell
what number, notify owner to correct problem.”

25) “Why is it needed?”

26) “It would depend on additional or enhancements were for
and how much?”

30) “Why? What is wrong with Signal Hill?”

31) “What do you mean by “merge”? Do we lose SH fire station so
close? Or do you mean you’d help each other out? I thought that was done anyway.”

32) “I like very much how they work with Signal Hill school from preschool on up. I feel
their visibility (esp. the air mask) would make the difference in my children running toward
or away from a firefighter.”

“The children have seen the firefighters suited in breathing funny. This year by year
reputation builds the children’s trust. Children dying in fires because they are hiding is so
tragic.”

C33 – “I admire the performance of you firefighters.”

C36 -- 26) “This depends on how much money.”

“Signal Hill Fire Department has a good reputation in the community.”

C44 – “Keep up the good work!”

C45 – “Will a summary of all your responses be published?”

C46 -- 24) “Fire safety classes for children”

“I do not believe a merger with the Belleville Fire District would enhance Signal Hill’s
Fire Protection services.”

C51 – “Thank you for the work that you do!”

C53 -- 8) “Know the rating improved!”

C55 -- 7) “I do know at least one individual receives a salary though; thus

Perhaps the 3rd is the answer.”

30) “Would be the best way to go.”

31) “Same as above, but I think our fire protection district is fine as is.”

“As I said above, I believe our Signal Hill Fire Dept. does an excellent job. Thank you very much.”

C67 – “Don’t know much about your department. But would like to know more.”

C69 -- 24) “I’m really not sure of all your services.”

“It appears you are always looking for ways to improve your services — for this I am grateful.”

C71 -- 26) “Depends on the services”

C72 – “We’re very proud of our fire department and respectfully we hope we will never need your services. You should be commended for all your efforts.”

C79 – “We just moved March 1st. I didn’t know we were Signal Hill. We have always been Northwest, so I honestly cannot answer some questions.”

C82 – “On both occasions that I had emergencies, the department was tops in all categories.”

C90 – “I have only lived in this district a short time. However, I am an insurance agent and realize that an ISO rating of 4 is a great accomplishment for a volunteer fire department.”

C92 -- 24) “Unlocks doors if locked out without key.”

C93 – “My Grandfather was a firefighter and I have a great respect for Those who serve! Thank you.”

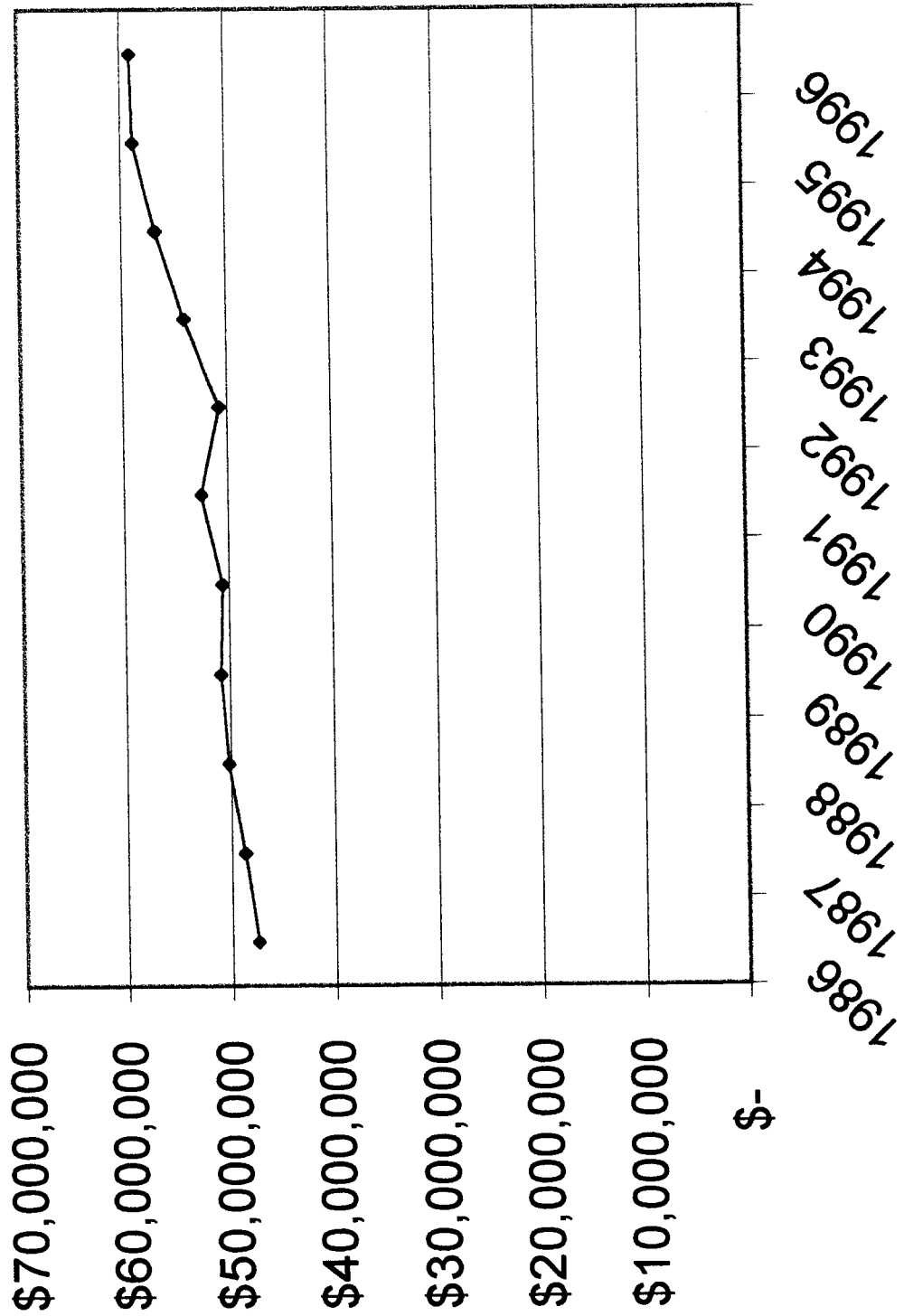
C94 – “Ribs and Raffle more than once a year.”

C95 – “New to neighborhood—many of my answers must be interpreted in that way.”

Appendix "D"

Equalized Assessed Valuation

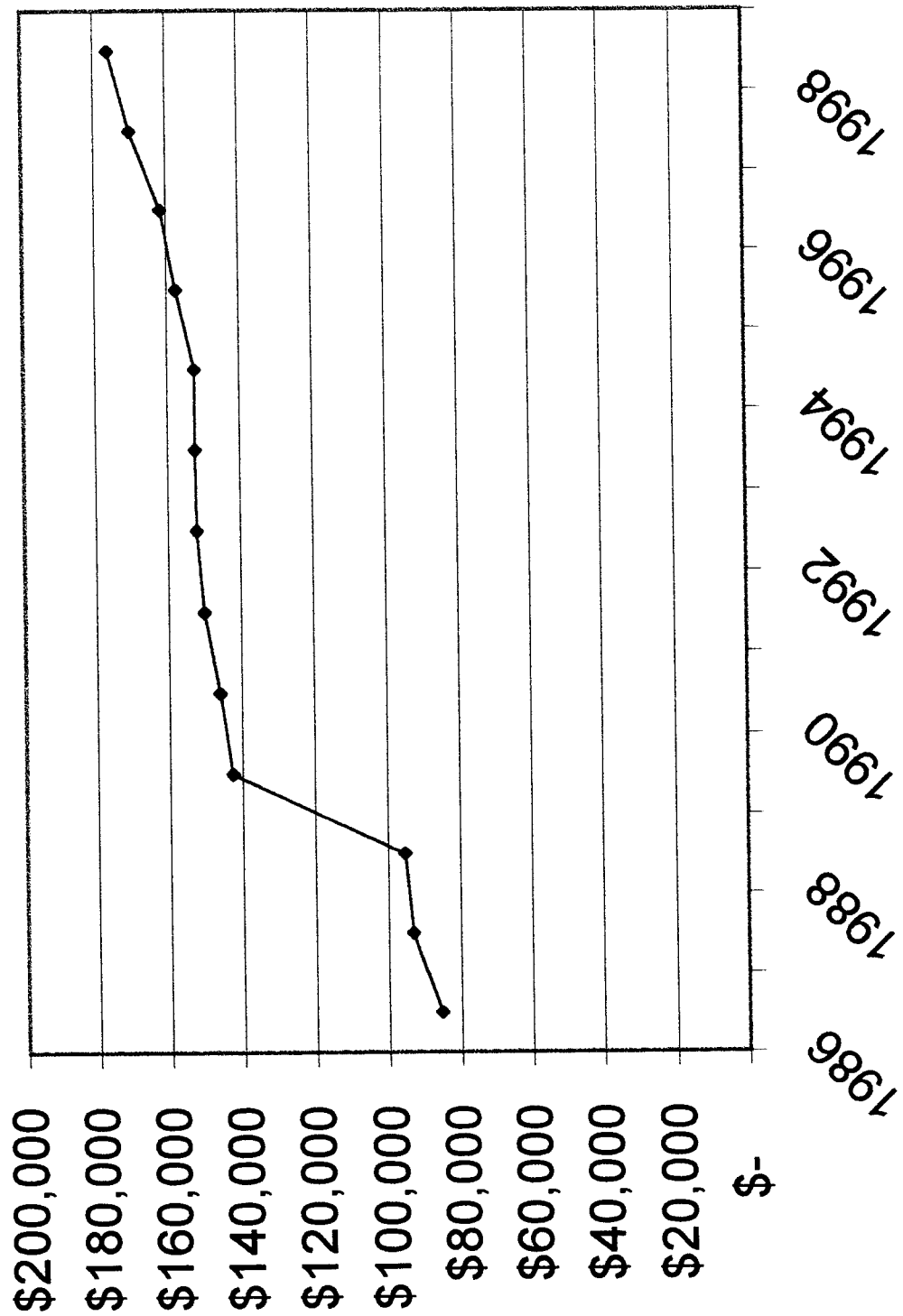
Equalized Assessed Valuation



Appendix "E"

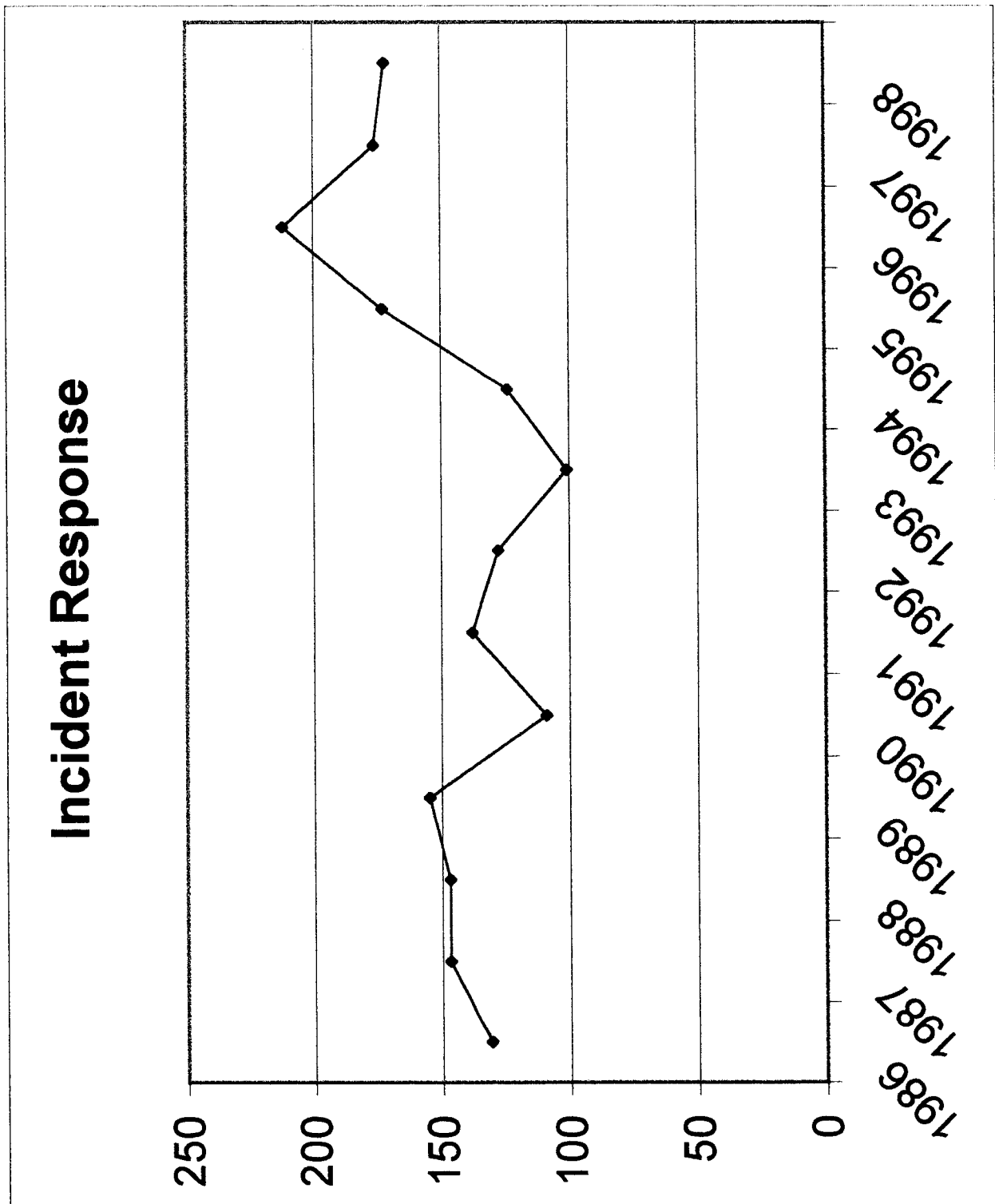
General Fund Revenue

F.P.D. General Fund



Appendix "F"

Incident Response



Appendix "G"

SIGNAL HILL

Fire Department

329 Hazel Avenue, Belleville, Illinois 62223

ADMINISTRATION (618) 397-1995 • FACSIMILE (618) 397-7747

March 3, 1999

DEAR RESIDENT:

The Signal Hill Fire Department is committed to providing the highest levels of quality service to our customers – you. In order to insure that we are meeting our customer's expectations it is necessary to provide for a feedback method to receive and assess carefully information needed to make informed and educated decisions regarding the current service levels. In addition, this information will be valuable as the department develops strategic plans and objectives in order to meet the future needs of our community.

Enclosed is a survey that will be used to determine your thoughts and opinions regarding the current level of services being provided. The survey also allows you the opportunity to provide us with guidance and direction for additional or enhancements to current service levels. The survey will only require approximately 3 minutes of your time to complete. Please complete your response form and return within the next 7 days.

Your address was selected at random. Your name or address are not required to complete the survey. For your convenience we have included a stamped – self-addressed return envelope. You are requested to be candid and sincere with your responses.

We are also seeking information regarding fire protection devices in your home and selected demographic data. This information will allow the responses used in a computerized analysis of information regarding public fire education programs.

Your opinion is important to us. Your cooperation and assistance with this project would be greatly appreciated. If you should have any questions, please contact me at 397-1995.

Thank you.



GREG RENDER, Chief of the Department

EMERGENCY — DIAL 9-1-1



SURVEY (Start)

In order to better serve the existing and future needs of the residents of the Signal Hill Fire Protection District, we are conducting this survey to ascertain your thoughts and opinion on the current level of fire protection services. You are requested to be very frank and straightforward when responding to the questions. Completing this survey will only require a few moments of your time. You are not being asked for your name or address.

By completing and returning this survey, you will be assisting your family and neighbors, insuring the future of quality fire protection services.

- 1) Age _____
- 2) Sex _____
- 3) Number of years at current address _____
- 4) Including yourself, please indicate the number of people that reside in your home. _____
- 5) Do you:
☐ Own my home, condominium
☐ Rent my home
☐ Rent an apartment or condominium
- 6) Prior to receiving this survey, did you know the name of your fire department? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- 7) The Signal Hill Fire Department is staffed by:
☐ Volunteer Firefighters
☐ Paid Firefighters
☐ Both Paid and Volunteer Firefighters
☐ Don't Know
- 8) The Signal Hill Fire Department currently has a Fire Insurance Classification rating of
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐ Don't Know
- 9) Does your home have smoke detectors? ☐ Yes ☐ No How Many? _____
- 10) Are your smoke detectors working? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- 11) Does your home have a fire and burglar alarm that is monitored by an alarm service company? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- 12) How many times a year do you check your smoke detectors? _____
- 13) How many times a year does your fire and burglar alarm service company check, clean and adjust your alarm system? _____
- 14) Does your home have a carbon monoxide detector? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- 15) Do you have fire extinguishers in your home? ☐ Yes ☐ No

SURVEY (Cont'd)



16) Do you recall ever receiving *Hot Flashes* – a community newsletter from the Signal Hill Fire Department? ☐ Yes ☐ No

17) I have read *Hot Flashes* and used some of the information to increase my family's safety..... ☐ Yes ☐ No

18) How many times a year should *Hot Flashes* be published? _____

19) Does your home have a fireplace? ☐ Yes ☐ No

20) If # 19 is yes, is it cleaned annually? ☐ Yes ☐ No

21) Fire Prevention Week is in ☐ September ☐ February ☐ April ☐ October ☐ Don't Know

22) Have you, or a member of your family ever received emergency services from the Signal Hill Fire Department..... ☐ Yes ☐ No

If Yes – Please rate the quality of services you received

- ☐ Greatly Satisfied
- ☐ Somewhat Satisfied
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Somewhat Dissatisfied
- ☐ Greatly Dissatisfied

23) Have any of your neighbors, friends or relatives ever received emergency services from the Signal Hill Fire Department? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If Yes – Please rate the quality of services received by your neighbors, friends or relatives as observed or reported to you.

- ☐ Greatly Satisfied
- ☐ Somewhat Satisfied
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Somewhat Dissatisfied
- ☐ Greatly Dissatisfied

24) To the best of my knowledge, the Signal Hill Fire Department provides the following services.

Please check all that apply.

	CURRENTLY PROVIDES THIS SERVICE	SHOULD PROVIDE THIS SERVICE
Fire Suppression	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emergency Medical Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Roadway Rescue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CPR Training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Home Fire Prevention Inspections	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business Fire Prevention Inspections	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fire Extinguisher Classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blood Pressure Checks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fire Safety Classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



SURVEY (Cont'd)

Please check all that apply.

CURRENTLY PROVIDES
THIS SERVICE

SHOULD PROVIDE
THIS SERVICE

Disaster Preparedness Classes

☐☐

Severe Storm Alerts (Warning Sirens)

☐☐

Other, Please Specify _____

- 25) Would you support a funding increase to maintain the current level of fire protection services? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- 26) Would you support funding for additional or enhancements to the current level of fire protection services? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- 27) I have supported the Signal Hill Fire Department's annual fund raising activity - Firefighters Ribs and Raffle Day at least once in the last 3 years? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- 28) I would consider becoming a volunteer firefighter. ☐ Yes ☐ No
- 29) At present, I personally know a Signal Hill volunteer firefighter. ☐ Yes ☐ No
- 30) Would you support a merger or consolidation with an adjoining fire protection district to maintain the current level of fire protection services? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- 31) Would you support a merger or consolidation with an adjoining fire protection district for additional or enhancements to the current level of fire protection services? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- 32) Regardless if you have ever received emergency services or not, please provide your overall perception of the current services provided by the Signal Hill Fire Department.
- ☐ Greatly Satisfied
- ☐ Somewhat Satisfied
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Somewhat Dissatisfied
- ☐ Greatly Dissatisfied

Please provide any additional comments you would like to offer _____

Thank You!

Thank you for your time. Please use the self addressed, stamped envelope to return the survey.
YOUR OPINION IS IMPORTANT TO US!